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KING FOR A DAY

By
W. A. FRASER
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SIR LEMUEL JONES, C. I. E., was chief commissioner of the Newcastle Maid, was his brother. More than that, they were twins, as like as two drops of water. It was known that Sir Lemuel should rise to be chief commissioner, while it was Larry's own fault that he was only captain of a freighter, but they both enjoyed themselves, each after his kind.

One morning in November the Newcastle Maid glided up the Inverell and swung to moorings just off the main wharf at Rahgun. Larry had not seen his brother for years, and for the matter that did not care if many years. They passed before he saw him. Their paths ran at right angles. He was there for a cargo of rice, not to renew family ties.

It was because the chief engineer of the Newcastle Maid was a man after his own heart that he said before going ashore: "I don't want to go late here, for I've had a letter from the owners over that last break I made in Calcutta. If I come off seas over just lock me in the cabin and don't let me out. No matter what I say, keep me there until I'm braced up."

Then the captain went ashore. He took a drive out through the can- tonments. As he bowed along in the old gharry a new experience came to him. Gentlemen lifted their hats and ladies driving in their carriages smiled and bowed in the most gracious manner.

"I wonder if there's anything stick- ing to my face," thought Larry, and he passed his hand carefully over his rounded surface. It seemed all right. But still they kept it up—everybody he met, and one officer, going by on his pony, took a pull at the animal's head and shouted, "Are you coming to the club tonight, sir?"

"No!" roared the captain, for he hadn't the faintest idea of going to a club without an invitation.

"They'll be awfully disappointed," came the echo of the officer's voice. The gharry opened up a gap between them.

"Very kind," muttered Larry, "but I fancy they'll get over it. Must have been the next minute Larry was busy staring open mouthed at the image of himself sitting in a carriage just in front. The carriage was turning out of a compound and blocked the road so that his own driver was forced to stop. He recognized the other man. It was Sir Lemuel, his twin brother.

The recognition was mutual. The commissioner bowed quite coldly, the captain called out, "How are you, brother?"

Then the big water horses whipped the carriage down the road at a slashing gait, and Larry was left alone.

"So that's why they've been taking off their hats to me," he mused. "They think I'm Sir Lemuel. I ought to be. I take me for Sir Lemuel. I ought to be. I must have called them yellow niggers over here. I'd like to be in his shoes just for a day to see how it feels to be king of Burma."

All the way back to the hotel he was thinking about it. Arrived there, he wrote a note addressed to the chief commissioner and sent it off by a messenger. "That will bring him," he mut- tered. "He always was a bit afraid of me."

It was 6 o'clock when Sir Lemuel ar- rived in his carriage. There was a great scurrying about of servants and no end of salivating the "Lat Sahib," as he was called. "I must be home for it was not often the chief commis- sioner honored the hotel with his pres- ence. He was shown to Captain Jones' room.

"Take a seat, Lem," said Captain Larry cheerfully. "I wanted to see you and thought you'd rather come here than receive me at Government house." "Please do not be so formal," said Sir Lemuel in his most dignified manner. "I have to attend a dinner at the club to- night in honor of the return of our ju- dicial commissioner."

"Oh, Sir Lemuel will be there in time for that," chuckled the captain. "But first, Lem, for the sake of old times, I want you to drink a glass of wine with me. You know, we took a drink togeth- er 'prety often the first year of our ex- istence." Then he broke into a loud, sniggering laugh that irritated the commis- sioner.

"While I don't approve of drinking to the extent you've carried it," said Sir Lemuel with judicial severity, "still I can't refuse a glass proffered by my brother."

"Your twin brother," broke in Larry. "Of whom you've always been so fond, you know."

"I really must be going, so please tell me where she is?"

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he noticed dressing the "boob"—he of the gorgeous liver—appeared, an- nouncing, "Johnson Sahib, sir."

"Who?" queried Captain Larry. "Secretary Sahib, sir."

"Oh, that's my private secretary," he thought.

"I've brought the speech, Sir Lemuel," said the young man as he entered. "You'll hardly have time to go through it before we start."

"Look here, Johnson," he said, "I think fever or something's working on you. I can't remember men's names all mixed up. I wouldn't go to this dinner tonight if I hadn't promised to. I ought to stay at home. Now I want you to help me through, and if it goes off all right I'll double your salary next month. Safe to promise that?"

"Let Lem attend to it!"

At the club as the captain entered the band struck up "God Save the Queen."

"By Jingo, we're late!" he said. "The show is over."

"He has got fever or som' thing," he thought. "Oh, no, Sir Lemuel, they're waiting for you to sit down to dinner. There's Mr. Barnes, the judicial commissioner, and Jones, the father of all Burmans."

"Judicial commissioner?" he asked. "Judicial commissioner?" he asked. "Judicial commissioner?" he asked.

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When the captain rose to his feet the secretary whispered in his ear: "For Now, it had been a source of irritat- ing regret to every deputy commis- sioner in the service that when he had caught a discolored red handed, convicted and sentenced him to be hanged and better wine in the house than this!" he asked the secretary, "Have it there wasn't he insisted upon the secretary writing out an order at once back in time for dinner, sure! I'll leave some for Lem too. This stuff isn't good for his blood," he said to himself grimly.

"I'm glad that race meet is on while I'm king," he thought as he drove down after him, taking his secretary with him. "They say the Prince of Wales always gets the straight tip, and I'll be sure to be put on to some- thing good."

And he was. Captain Lushton told him that his mare Nettie was sure to win the Rangun Plate, forgetting to mention that he himself had backed Tomboy for the same race.

"Must have wrenched a leg," Lush- ton assured Larry when Nettie came in absolutely last, but as the secretary wrote "10 to 1" for all the bets he made and as Sir Lemuel would be in his own again before setting day and would have to pay up it did not really matter to the captain. The regiments was so pleased with Sir Lemuel's contributions that the best they had in their manure was none too good for him. The ladies found him an equally ready mark. Mrs. Leyburn was pretty and had fish to fry. "I must do a little missionary work while the Ironclad's away," she thought. Her mission was to install her husband in the position of port of- ficer. That came out later—came out at the ball that night. The captain as- sured her that he would attend.

There is always a sort of Donny- brook Derby at the end of a race day in Rangun. Ponies are greatly regu- spected from their more or less willing owners and handed over, minus their saddles, to sailors, who pilot them ex- citation around the course for a con- siderable prize. When the captain saw the hat going around for the prize mon- ey he ordered the secretary to write him a "chit" for 200 rupees. "Give them something worth while, poor chaps!" he said.

"And to think that the Ironclad has kept his betted up so long!" muttered Lushton.

"I always said you had a good heart," Mrs. Leyburn whispered to the captain, she added maliciously, meaning, of course, Lady Jones.

The chief commissioner was easily the most popular man in Burma that night. It was with difficulty the blue- jackets could be kept from carrying him home on their shoulders. "I hope Lem is looking after the cargo all right," murmured the captain as he drove home to dinner. "I seem to be getting along nicely. Lucky the old cat's away."

The captain danced the opening quadrille at the ball with the wife of his sea life, and a couple of town trains aged it pretty well. The secretary had plotted him for that. Then Mrs. Leyburn swooped down upon him.

There is an adornment of the ball to every ballroom in the east, known as the kala jagah. It may be a conserva- tory or a bay window. A quiet sent among the crotons, with the drowsy drone of the waltz fitting in and out among the leaves, is just the place to work a man.

"I'm telling you this now, but Mrs. Leyburn knew it long ago, moons before Captain Larry opened the ball with the financial commissioner's wife. Not that Mrs. Leyburn was the only woman with a mission-official life in the ballroom. There were others. "India is full of them—only she had the start; that was all."

"It's scandalous," another missionary said to Captain Lushton. "They've been in there an hour; they've sat out three dances. I'm sorry for poor dear Lady Jones."

Among the crotons the missionary in the field was saying: "I'm sure Jack ordered the launch to meet you at the steamer that time, Sir Lemuel. He knew you were frightfully angry about it and has felt it terribly. He's simply afraid to ask you for the billet of port officer, and that horrible man who is acting officer now will get it, and poor Jack won't be able to send me up to Darjeeling next hot weather. And you'll be going for a month again next season, Sir Lemuel, won't you?"

Now, as it happened, the captain had a row with the acting port officer coming up the river, so it was just in his hit, as he expressed it. "I'll arrange it for Jack tomorrow," he said. "Never fear, little woman," (He spoke of you as Jack," she told Leyburn later on, "and it's all right, love. Lucky the Ironclad was away.")

A lady approaching from the ball- room heard a little rattle among the plants, pushed eagerly forward and stood before them. Another mis- sionary had entered the field. "I beg pardon, Sir Lemuel," and she disappeared. "Perfectly scandalous!" she said as she met Lushton: "Some one ought to advise dear Lady Jones of that desig- nating creature's behavior."

"For Cupid's sake, don't," ejaculated Lushton fervently. "Let the old boy have his fling. He doesn't get out of- ter."

"I've no intention of doing so my- self," said his companion with asper- ity.

But all the same a telegram went that night to Lady Jones at Proms, which bore good fruit next day and much of it.

When they emerged from the crotons Mrs. Leyburn was triumphant. The captain was also more or less pleased probably crack Lem's head when he doesn't get his appointment," he thought.

The captain slipped away early from the ball. It seemed somehow as though the fun had gone out of the thing. He began to have misgivings as to the likelihood of the chief engineer keep- ing his brother shut up much longer. "I'll get out of this in the morning," he said as he turned into bed. "I've had enough of it. I'll scuttie the ship and clear out."

This virtuous intention would have been easy of accomplishment, com- paratively, if he had not slept until 10

o'clock. When he awoke the secretary came to him with a troubled face. "There's a telegram from Lady Jones, Sir Lemuel, asking for the carriage to meet her at the station, and I've sent it. She's chartered a special train, and we expect her any moment."

"Great Scott, I'm lost!" moaned the captain. "I must get out of this. Help me dress quickly, that's a good fellow."

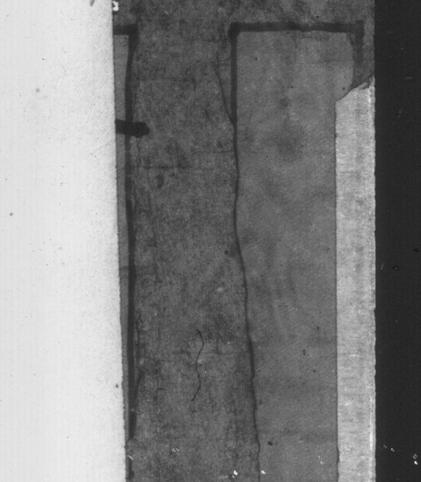
An official accosted him as he came out of his room. "I want to see you, Sir Lemuel."

"Is that your tontom at the door?" answered the captain quite irrele- vantly.

"Yes, Sir Lemuel."

"Well, just wait here for a few min- utes. I've got to meet Lady Jones, and I'm late."

Jumping into the cart he drove off at a furious clip. Fate, in the shape



"Stop!" she cried excitedly. "Where are you going, Sir Lemuel?"

of the Ironclad, swooped down upon him at the very gate. He met Lady Jones face to face.

"Stop!" she cried excitedly. "Where are you going, Sir Lemuel?"

"I'm not Sir Lemuel!" roared the disappointed captain.

"Since exhibition you're making of yourself—chief commissioner of Bur- ma!"

"I'm not the commissioner of Burma. I'm not your Sir Lemuel," he answered, anxious to get away at any cost.

"The man is mad. The next thing you'll deny that I'm your wife!"

"Neither are you!" roared the en- raged captain, and away he sped.

Lady Jones followed. It was a pro- cession, the red spokes of the tontom twirling in and out the bright patches of sunlight as it whirled along be- tween the big banyan trees, and behind the carriage Lady Jones sitting bolt upright with her feet. The captain reached the wharf first. He was down the steps and into a sampan like a shot.

It was the only sampan there. The carriage dashed up at that instant. There was no other boat. There was nothing for it but to wait.

"Come, Lem; get into these duds and clear out!" cried the captain as he burst into his cabin.

"You villain, I'll have you sent to the Andamans for this!" exclaimed the prisoner.

"Quick! Your wife's waiting on the dock," said Larry.

"That had the desired effect. Sir Lemuel became as a child that had played truant.

"What have you done, Larry?" he cried pathetically. "You've ruined me. "So? I've done you good. And I've left you some decent wine at the house. Get ashore before she comes off."

"There's no help for it," said Sir Lemuel. "There are your orders to proceed to Calcutta to load. Your beastly chief engineer insisted on shoving them in to me."

"Don't 'my love' me!" said the Iron- clad when Sir Lemuel climbed penitently into the carriage. "An hour ago you denied that I was your wife! And so they drove off, the sycr tak- ing the tontom back to its owner. It took Sir Lemuel days and days to straighten out the empire after the role of the man who had been "king for a day."

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